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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 QUEBEC 000215

SIPDIS

PARIS UNESCO FOR JANET COWLEY

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SUBJECT: QUEBEC GOVERNMENT ON UNESCO CULTURAL DIVERSITY CONVENTION

CLASSIFIED BY: Abigail Friedman, CG, QUEBEC CITY, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Government of Quebec (GOQ) officials requested a meeting with CG Friedman to review the bidding on the draft UNESCO Cultural Diversity Convention in advance of the Dec. 14-17 drafting group meeting in Paris, where Quebec will participate as an observer. GOQ officials said Quebec is not anti-free trade but does want a convention that "protects" cultural diversity from rulings in other fora such as the WTO, which might one day force Quebec to change its present system of cultural subsidies and regulations. Separately we note that Quebec's desire for a seat at the table at UNESCO is part of a broader trend of increased Quebec assertiveness on the international stage. End summary.

12. (U) Quebec Ministry of Culture and Communications officials Andre Dorval and Gerard Grandmont, and International Relations Ministry officials Luc Bergeron and France Genest told CG that Quebec wants to see a cultural diversity convention in place not because of any present encroachment of Quebec's cultural subsidies and regulations, but because of their concern for the future. Quebec fears that at some point a case could be successfully brought before the WTO or elsewhere, forcing Quebec to change its policies.

13. (U) Our interlocutors stressed that the GOQ is not anti-free trade. Bergeron noted that Quebec has been a leader in Canada on free trade, having pushed hard in favor of a Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. and NAFTA. Nor does Quebec wish to exclude other cultures, he said. As an example, he said Quebec has never objected to American English language television programs, because there is a healthy local francophone television industry in Quebec. Quebec simply wants to insure that its products have a place sufficient to maintain Quebec's cultural identity, said Bergeron.

Quebec Allies on Cultural Diversity

14. (C) Dorval told us that while France is a tactical ally for Quebec at UNESCO, the two governments face very different cultural diversity challenges. Quebec has real problems with access to French markets for its cultural goods and wants greater market liberalization in France. At the same time, French cultural products (especially books) could swamp the Quebec market, were it not for Quebec subsidies and regulations that support Quebec cultural industries like publishing.

15. (C) Without elaborating on China's position, our interlocutors told us that Quebec sees completely eye-to-eye with the Chinese on the matter of cultural diversity. International Relations Minister Monique Gagnon-Tremblay was in China for a meeting related to cultural diversity this fall, and according to the MRI she came back very upbeat about the Chinese position.

Lobbying the U.S. Private Sector

16. (SBU) Dorval said the GOQ is exploring the idea of lobbying the U.S. private sector entertainment industry. The GOQ believes the U.S. private sector has not been as opposed to a UNESCO convention as one might expect, perhaps because U.S. business understands that a convention could support intellectual property rights and help staunch copyright infringement. (Note: The Quebec logic seems to be that if countries are encouraged to protect and develop their own local cultural industries, then those countries would fight harder to stop intellectual property theft as these government will want their publics to buy local cultural products. End note.)

Comment

17. (C) Quebec's assertiveness on cultural diversity reflects both the importance of the issue to Quebec and the widely shared belief here that if an area is within the purview of Canadian provinces - e.g., cultural and educational issues - then Quebec should have full power to engage on the issue, including on the international stage. Quebec's desire for a seat at the UNESCO

talks also is part of provincial Premier Charest's broader strategy of raising Quebec's international profile while remaining firmly within Canada. Without taking a position on the question of Quebec' role in international fora, the CG noted that Quebec's eagerness to be in the vanguard on cultural diversity coupled with its unfettered support for tactical allies could cost the GOQ in its reputation as a promoter of free-trade.

FRIEDMAN